

REVIEWS

The Plumber's Kitchen: The Secret Story of American Spy Weapons, by Donald B. McLean, Norinont Technical Publications, P.O. Drawer N-2, Wickenburg, AZ 85358, \$12.95, 8 1/2" x 11", 282 pp., 132 photographs and illustrations.

There has always been a gaping hole in weapons' history, that of clandestine weapons, and this very thoroughly researched and well-illustrated volume goes a long way toward filling the void. The reviewer has read virtually all the works printed in the English language during the 20th century on the subject of weapons, but this fresh volume held a surprise or revelation on nearly every page. Primarily a history of what-when-why and by-whom of the special weapons developed for the secret Office of Strategic Services (and largely still in use by the C.I.A.), this book presents technical and historical data in a very palatable combination; the hard tech data is there for the advanced ordnance enthusiast, but presented in a non-technical narrative form for the historian and casual reader.

As the author points out, the technological advances of the past few decades have changed the arts of espionage and intelligence into a peculiar sort of subsience, equipped with its special, and heretofore secret weapons, tools and devices.

In what amounts to a research coup, the author categorically delineates nearly 60 research projects, and the secret weapons which sprang from these projects to the hands of spies and agents in the field. These weapons were a mixed bag, from little black boxes, time bombs, clandestine radio gear, disguised munitions, a wide array of explosive devices (to blast a train, plane, man or installation), to intelligence gathering and transmitting devices, poisons, pen guns and plastic explosives — including one with which an agent can bake biscuits or blow up a bridge. Silent weapons, spring weapons, sabotage weapons, special weapons and sneaky weapons, all presented in an interesting historical narrative which is a must for every weapons' library.

All the standard texts have exhibited a dearth of material in this area, and the author is to be commended for the

massive and obviously difficult research which provides good solid data in a field which has been prefactorily ignored by authors not willing to do the homework.

PLUMBER'S KITCHEN

